

To: Dr. Kristin Latham Scott, Faculty Senate President

From: President Rex Fuller
Provost Rob Winningham

cc: Dean Chelle Batchelor
Dean Kathy Cassity
Dean Mark Girod

Date: May 28, 2020

Re: Context and Information in Response to the Faculty Proposal Submitted to Faculty Senate

A proposal recommendation was submitted by Dr. Kim Jensen as new business to Faculty Senate on May 26, 2020:

“In light of the financial crisis created by the conditions of the coronavirus pandemic, and given that legislation required for a Western Oregon University Doctorate of Physical Therapy has not passed the Oregon State Legislature and that Western does not have the Oregon Higher Education Coordinating Committee approval for such a program, the members of the Faculty Senate of Western Oregon University call for a moratorium on all funding relating to a Doctorate of Physical Therapy program until the end of the financial crisis and the period of uncertainty due to the pandemic. Allocating scarce resources to a program not yet approved is not a strategic decision for WOU in these uncertain conditions.”

In response to this proposal, WOU administration is sharing some of the context and facts related to the proposed Doctor of Physical Therapy (DPT) Program. We hope this information helps to inform conversations among faculty before the next Faculty Senate meeting.

Fiscal Benefits to WOU

The Faculty Senate proposal highlights the current financial crisis, which is indeed a serious concern for WOU. Here it is important to note that the DPT program is intended to address that issue. The DPT program is conservatively estimated to net \$4M per year, once the program has all three annual cohorts enrolled. Given that we have experienced approximately a 25% reduction in our student population in the past decade, WOU needs to look for ways to increase future enrollments and revenue. The DPT would go a long way toward fulfilling that need. It should also be noted that, WOU is highly motivated to keep costs under control, in part so we can continue making progress on our Strategic Planning goal of becoming Oregon’s most affordable public university. Therefore, we are committed to being prudent in our expenditures for any new or continuing program.

Enrollment and Benefits to Other WOU Programs

In addition to the significant revenue that the DPT program is expected to generate for WOU, we also anticipate an associated bump in undergraduate enrollment as students come to WOU to pursue pre-professional tracks. We saw that type of undergraduate bump when WOU partnered with OHSU, ten

years ago, and developed a nursing program. This undergraduate bump in enrollment would be experienced throughout the university as these pre-professional students enroll in general education and elective courses, in addition to their major and pre-professional courses. WOU can't afford another decade of contraction and enrollment declines. Without new programs that bring significant revenue into the university we are likely to continue to see slow enrollment and revenue declines, given the changing demographics and flat or reduced number of students graduating from Oregon high schools.

It is important to note that additional revenue from the DPT program and additional undergraduates pursuing health sciences will be used to support *all* of the university's academic programming, including areas that might require expenditures beyond the enrollment revenue they generate.

Legislative Authority

Language allowing WOU, SOU and EOU to offer professional doctorates was approved by the Oregon Senate Education Committee and Joint Ways and Means Committee. It was set to be passed by the House of Representatives and the Senate, but the 2020 Republican walk out prevented legislation from being passed. Given our numerous conversations with leaders in both the Oregon House and Senate, there is no reason to expect that WOU will not receive approval to offer professional doctorates during an upcoming legislative session.

Current and Future Expenses

WOU has not incurred significant expenses thus far in our efforts to develop a Doctor of Physical Therapy beyond the time spent by certain faculty and staff.

WOU doesn't anticipate any expenses for the DPT program in the next fiscal year. Once WOU receives a legislative fix to ORS 352.011, the timing will be driven by the Commission on Accreditation in Physical Therapy Education (CAPTE) accreditation queue, which might allow for a first incoming class as early as Fall 2024 or Fall 2025. If the accreditation queue indicates that a Fall 2024 start is likely, per accreditation requirements, the earliest we would need to begin searching for a Director would be during Fiscal Year 2022. Of course, WOU will also need to plan for faculty searches that would need to take place before the first cohort begins.

Student and Market Needs

At May 26 Faculty Senate meeting, one Senator expressed the view that OIT and OSU-Cascades approval to offer a DPT could hurt WOU or make WOU's program less viable. While we continue to monitor market demand, it is important to note that currently there is only one spot available for every ten qualified students who apply for a DPT program in Oregon. Moreover, the size of each university's DPT program's cohorts is based on the number of clinical field placement contracts available to the institution; most of those clinical sites need to be geographically close to the home institution. This means that the OIT and OSU-Cascades programs will have minimal impacts on WOU's program, given their geographical distances. Furthermore, in 2019, the Statewide Provost Council (which includes provosts from OSU and OIT) reported to HECC that *"The Statewide Provosts Council completed a review of the need for physical therapists in Oregon and determined that there is sufficient demand to justify and support multiple new*

proposed programs.” The Provost Council then unanimously approved WOU’s DPT program, even knowing the OSU-Cascades and OIT would also be pursuing programs to serve their regions of the state.

Additionally, the two existing DPT programs in Oregon (George Fox and Pacific) have been supportive of the WOU proposal providing further evidence that that the concern about program viability and enrollment demand is without foundation. These programs would not support WOU’s DPT program if they felt there was a market demand concern.

Conclusion

In summary, while the concern expressed in the Faculty Senate proposal about curbing unnecessary expenditures is understandable, examining the proposed DPT program within its full context clearly demonstrates that developing this program will help WOU to achieve long-term fiscal sustainability. In contrast to the last sentence in the Faculty Senate proposal, the decision to pursue a high-demand, revenue-generating program that will help stabilize WOU’s financial picture over the long term is indeed a strategic decision, and is an important step to take in order for the institution to weather this uncertainty as well as any other future contingencies that may arise. Diversification of revenue streams, now more than ever, is an important step for WOU to take in order to assure that it can continue delivering its educational mission well into the future.